

**MEETING OF FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL-TERRITORIAL MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS
AND
LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Opening Remarks

**Betty Ann Lavallée, CD. QJ. (Ret.)
National Chief, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples**

Good morning Chairman Duguid, Ministers, fellow National Aboriginal Leaders and Officials.

Intergovernmental relations lie at the heart of Canadian federalism and policymaking and that is why we are here today. This is an important forum for information exchange, negotiation, and consensus building on shared goals. The reach and quality of our discussions here today are central to moving forward to improve the socioeconomic conditions for all Aboriginal peoples in Canada. We are pleased to have Minister Strahl at the table.

It's appropriate to reflect on where we are and where we intend to go with this process. We've been down this road before with the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA)... KELOWNA... and others. I think that we would all agree that there is a need for a sharper and more meaningful FPTA process to deal with Aboriginal issues.

There are real gains to be made when all parties work collaboratively to support a strong and effective intergovernmental process. The reality in Canada is that not all Aboriginal peoples are treated alike. When some are treated in discriminatory ways by policy, their political identity, orientation, and participation patterns are affected. By working together to improve the quality of life for all Aboriginal peoples, there will be concrete and tangible results for everyone.

Today, we will be focusing on two priority areas and working toward practical next steps. This meeting represents an opportunity to raise the profile of Aboriginal issues. Through this process, we can chart and implement policies that will produce meaningful results in the fabric of the lives of all the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.

Central to the challenges we face in intergovernmental relations are the complexity of the process and the normal churn of political leadership. We must keep in mind that a successful FPTA process could result in increased public confidence in decisions to move the Aboriginal agenda forward. Canadians need to be aware of the large and growing Aboriginal population, the socio-economic gap, and the constructive dialogue and actions required to realize beneficial change.

This FPTA process can build trust and productive lasting working relationships. If we work well at this table, it will facilitate and promote a fuller discussion at other tables.

Development in our communities is dependent on the lead shown by an effective FPTA process. Without this, it will not be possible to have a coherent framework to close the socio-economic gap. Measuring and reporting progress on this initiative will provide for accountability and an important feedback mechanism.

We all have an obligation to ensure that this meeting succeeds, so it can be remembered as a historic moment when we resolve to work together in a meaningful relationship, through a process that must provide focus and vision to realize actions that are meaningful to the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada.